



# Republican Policy Committee

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## Nuclear Waste Bill Is a Vote for the Environment

Given a choice, most Americans would choose to have one safe, environmentally sound storage site for the disposal of thousands of tons of nuclear waste existing in this country, as opposed to having that waste stockpiled in more than 80 facilities around the nation — which is the current situation. A single storage site is clearly the pro-environmental option. Moreover, millions of Americans have paid for this long-needed and long-promised consolidated waste storage site.

S. 1936, a bipartisan bill to amend the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, will correct the current environmental problem of 80 separate, temporary sites. In addition to moving toward a permanent repository, the bill directs construction of a single interim high-level nuclear waste storage facility to be ready to accept nuclear waste by November 30, 1999.

Concerns raised regarding the transportation of the waste to the site are addressed by S. 1936's retention of the safeguards of existing federal and state environmental and hazardous transportation laws designed to ensure safe transportation and storage of the waste.

### *Nuclear Waste is Being Stored in 41 States in Temporary Facilities*

- ▶ Today, more than 30,000 metric tons of highly radioactive nuclear waste sits in storage pools at 110 nuclear power plants which were *never intended for long-term storage*. These storage pools are located at some 75 sites, in 34 states. Moreover, civilian nuclear plants add 2,000 metric tons of waste *each year* to these pools. None of these storage pools provides the degree of environmental and national security safeguards that would be provided by the single remote site.
- ▶ In addition, federal nuclear reactor and defense program wastes are stored in 11 states, including 100 million gallons of stored nuclear waste in temporary holding tanks in the states of Washington, South Carolina, and Idaho.
- ▶ President Clinton's Secretary of Energy recently announced the United States would accept 20 metric tons of nuclear waste from foreign countries over the next 13 years, which will be transported from ports of entry to South Carolina and Idaho and will be added to the defense wastes already in those sites.

## ***Environmental Safety Law Will Apply to the Storage and Transfer Facilities***

- ▶ **NEPA Will Apply to the Construction of the Interim Storage Facility:** S. 1936 requires the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EIS will be required in connection with any licensing decision with respect to the interim storage facility. Essentially, the bill requires the NRC to treat the Department of Energy (DOE)'s licensing application in the same way that it would any private applicant seeking an operating license. However, the bill does focus the EIS on the licensing issues rather than site selections issues, as site selection will have been determined by Congress in this legislation or in any future legislation to approve the president's selection of an alternative interim site.
- ▶ **NEPA Also Applies to Selection and Construction of Intermodal Transfer Facility:** The bill clarifies that NEPA will be applicable to any decision by the DOE to select a site for and commence construction of the facility that will transfer the wastes from the transportation platforms to the storage facility.
- ▶ **NEPA Applies to the Permanent Storage Facility, as Required in Current Law:** S. 1936 is similar to current law, which requires the Department of Energy to complete an Environmental Impact Statement before constructing a permanent repository. The bill also does not alter the Nuclear Waste Policy Act's requirement that NRC conduct an EIS before licensing the permanent repository.

## ***Health Standards Are Protected at the Storage Sites***

- ▶ S. 1936 provides that the repository may not release radioactivity at a maximum annual dose that exceeds 100 millirem to an average member of the general population in the vicinity of Yucca Mountain. This is NRC's general public protection standard and is fully consistent with current national and international standards designed to protect public health and safety and the environment.
- ▶ S. 1936 further provides that the NRC may apply another standard if it finds that this standard would pose an unreasonable risk to the health and safety of the public.

## ***Environmental Safeguards Provided During Transportation of Waste***

- ▶ S. 1936 requires that actions under the bill be governed by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, the Atomic Energy Act, and the Hazardous Materials Transportation Act and any other requirement of federal, state, or local law that is not inconsistent with those acts.
- ▶ S. 1936 specifies that the Hazardous Waste Materials Transportation Act (HMTA) shall apply to all shipments. Under the HMTA, the Secretary of Transportation regulates highway routing, packaging, labeling, shipping papers, personnel training, loading and

unloading, and handling and storage, as well as transportation vehicle requirements. S. 1936 requires that the transportation of spent fuel under S. 1936 shall be governed by all requirements of federal, state, and local governments and Indian tribes to the same extent that any person engaging in transportation in interstate commerce must comply with those requirements, as provided by the HMTA.

### ***Ratepayer Funds Are Not Achieving Results***

- ▶ Since 1983, electric ratepayers have been taxed almost ***\$12 billion*** for a Nuclear Waste Fund, under the premise that these monies would be used to build a safe high-level nuclear storage repository to permanently dispose of the spent fuel wastes generated by civilian nuclear power plants.
- ▶ In addition, ratepayers also have been subsidizing the creation of a permanent repository for government-owned nuclear spent fuel and nuclear weapons production wastes, which also have not been permanently stored anywhere.
- ▶ *Approximately \$6 billion has been spent directly on nuclear waste disposal over a 15-year period*, without either an interim or a permanent site being built. This is grossly unfair, unsafe, and environmentally unsound.

Surely, the right thing to do is to come to closure on the construction of a single, controlled storage facility, instead of retaining the storage of highly radioactive nuclear wastes at more than 80 sites throughout the country in facilities that were not designed to be long-term.

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